

FREE PRINTABLE · UPDATED AUGUST 2026

Japan Craft & Collectible Field Kit

Eight pages to print and carry: which craft town makes what, what to check before you buy, the five free things worth collecting, the shop phrases you will actually need, and the tax-free rules that change on 1 November 2026.

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Before you go

Two things decide whether shopping in Japan goes smoothly, and neither is about money. The first is a rule change most English guides have not caught up with.

Tax-free shopping changes on 1 November 2026

	Until 31 Oct 2026	From 1 Nov 2026
At the till	Tax removed at purchase	You pay the full tax-inclusive price
Getting the money back	Nothing to do	Claim a refund on departure — customs terminals, or Visit Japan Web before check-in
Minimum spend	¥5,000 before tax, same store, same day	Unchanged
Time limit	30 days consumables / 6 months general goods	All goods bought within 90 days of departure
Sealed bags	Consumables sealed, not to be opened	Category and packaging rule abolished — but do not consume before you leave

In practice: budget the full shelf price, keep passport and receipts together, and leave time at the airport — the refund step happens before check-in, not after security. A trip that straddles 1 November will meet both systems.

Getting it home

Knives	Checked baggage. Always — never hand luggage, any airline, any airport. Keep the shop's packaging.
Ceramics	Hand luggage if you can. Buy them last, or ask about domestic shipping (発送 hassō) to your hotel.
Alcohol	Japan allows three 760 ml bottles on arrival. Your own country sets its own limit, and most proxy services refuse alcohol.
Weight	Pottery, cast iron, tools and stones are dense. Leave the space on the way out, not the excess-baggage fee on the way back.
Duty at home	Every country sets a personal allowance (the US, for example, US\$800 per person). Keep receipts and declare honestly.

What you cannot carry, you can still buy

Kiln-direct ceramics, single-estate teas, named-quarry whetstones, left-handed single-bevel knives and most carpentry tools never reach amazon.com. They are sold on Japanese marketplaces, which a proxy service will buy from and forward on your behalf.

Craft towns at a glance — knives

Town	Known for	What you can do there	Best time
Sakai, Osaka 堺	Single-bevel professional kitchen knives	Free museum; paid sharpening and handle-fitting classes	Any time
Seki, Gifu 関	Volume production — Kai and Feather blades	Swordsmith museum, monthly forging demo, October festival	2nd weekend of Oct
Echizen, Fukui 越前	Hand-forged blades; first cutlery named a national craft	Observation deck over a live workshop; bookable knife-making course	Any time, book ahead
Tsubame-Sanjo, Niigata 燕三条	Stainless, Western cutlery, kitchen tools	100+ factories open to the public — festival only	1-4 Oct 2026
Miki, Hyogo 三木	Carpentry tools — saws, chisels, planes	Hardware festival, tool markets, sharpening workshop	Early Nov

Rail from Tokyo, fastest services (±20%): Tsubame-Sanjo ~100 min · Seki ~120 min · Sakai ~140 min · Miki ~160 min · Echizen ~175 min. All five need a further local hop.

Craft towns at a glance — pottery

Town	Makes	The walk	Next big date
Tokoname, Aichi 常滑	Stoneware, teapots, the lucky cat	Marked Pottery Footpath, 1.6 km or 4 km	Any time
Mashiko, Tochigi 益子	Folk-craft stoneware, everyday tableware	One long main street of shops and kilns	31 Oct – 3 Nov 2026
Arita, Saga 有田	Porcelain — Japan's first	~4 km between two stations, shop to shop	Autumn fair in November
Imbe (Bizen), Okayama 伊部	Unglazed wood-fired stoneware	Compact — the town is around the station	17 Oct 2026
Shigaraki, Shiga 信楽	Stoneware, and the tanuki	Workshop-lined streets plus a 40 ha park	Any time

Rail from Tokyo: Mashiko ~50 min · Tokoname ~95 min · Shigaraki ~140 min · Imbe ~195 min · Arita ~345 min.

Craft towns at a glance — tea

The production ranking most English guides still have backwards: Kagoshima has been ahead of Shizuoka in aracha for two consecutive years (FY2024 and FY2025).

Measure	Kagoshima	Shizuoka	Note
Aracha production, FY2025	30,000 t	24,100 t	Kagoshima ahead, second year running
First flush (ichibancha), 2025	8,440 t	8,120 t	Shizuoka down ~19% year on year
Tencha (matcha raw leaf)	1st	3rd	Kyoto 2nd; national output 5,336 t in FY2024

Region	What the cup tastes like	From Tokyo
Sayama, Saitama 狭山	Extra firing — roasted aroma	~25 min
Shizuoka 静岡	Bright everyday sencha	~60 min
Uji, Kyoto 宇治	Matcha and gyokuro, the classical name	~130 min
Yame, Fukuoka 八女	Shaded gyokuro — sweet and thick	~300 min
Chiran, Kagoshima 知覧	Bright sencha from the new number one	~395 min

Buy small quantities. Japanese green tea is a fresh product and fades within months of opening.

Craft towns at a glance — whisky

The question that decides the trip is not which whisky, it is whether you can get in.

Distillery	Town	Can you get in?	Cost
Yoichi 余市	Yoichi, Hokkaido	Yes — free self-guided entry; guided tour by booking	Free tour; paid tasting
Yamazaki 山崎	Shimamoto, Osaka	Lottery — apply ~2 months ahead, short window	~¥3,000 / ¥10,000
Hakushu 白州	Hokuto, Yamanashi	Lottery, plus a first-come cancellation course	~¥3,000 / ¥10,000
Mars Komagatake 駒ヶ岳	Miyada, Nagano	Yes — free tour, booking prioritised when busy	Free tour; tastings charged
Chichibu 秩父	Chichibu, Saitama	No — trade only, by appointment	—

What to check before you buy

Knives — three questions, in this order

1. Single or double bevel?	Single-bevel (片刃 kataba) is the professional Japanese shape — sharpened on one side, harder to sharpen, and left-handers need a left-handed one. Double-bevel (両刃 ryōba) santoku and gyuto are what most people actually want.
2. Hand-forged or made at scale?	Neither is a fake. A hand-forged Sakai blade passes through a forger, a sharpener and a handle-maker. A Seki factory knife is finished to a tolerance no single smith can match, at a fifth of the price.
3. Carbon or stainless?	Carbon steel is sharper and rusts — both facts arrive the same day. Budget for a stone at the same time, and dry the blade immediately every time.

Whetstones — the grit ladder

Grit	Japanese	What it is for
~#220-400	荒砥 arato	Repair work — chips and reshaping. Most travellers never need it.
~#800-2000	中砥 nakato	The main sharpening zone. If you buy one stone, buy #1000.
~#3000 and up	仕上げ砥 shiageto	Finishing an already-sharp edge.
Ungraded, fine	合砥 awasedo	Kyoto natural finishing stones. Every stone is different.
—	面直し mennaoshi	Flattening a dished stone. The maintenance nobody warns you about.

Pottery and tea

Pottery	Buy the fragile things last. Ask about domestic shipping to your hotel. Two of the largest markets fall this autumn — Bizen on 17 Oct 2026, Mashiko 31 Oct – 3 Nov 2026 — where hundreds of makers sell direct.
Tea	Ask for the harvest, not just the grade. Buy small, sealed, and recent; green tea fades within months of opening.
Anything	限定 (gentei, limited) is a regional or seasonal edition, not a marketing word. It is also the word that empties wallets.

The five free collections

Japan runs several nationwide collecting systems that cost nothing or almost nothing. They double as a reason to go somewhere you would not otherwise visit — which is the actual point.

What	Cost	Where you get it	The catch
Goshuin 御朱印	¥300-500	Shrines and temples nationwide	Bring the book first — a goshuinchō, sold at shrines and stationers. Not a stamp rally: it is written for you, by hand, one at a time.
Station stamps 駅スタンプ	Free	Station concourses; also a digital app	Ink pads dry out. Bring your own book and press evenly.
Manhole cards マンホールカード	Free	Local tourist offices and town halls	One per person per visit, and only in person. Check opening hours — many are municipal offices, closed at weekends.
Castle stamps 御城印	Free rally stamps; paid gojōin sheets	Japan's 100 Famous Castles and beyond	The rally book and the paper sheets are two different collections.
Roadside stations 道の駅	Free	Michi-no-eki nationwide	Practical only if you are driving. There are roughly 1,220 of them.

The one thing to buy first

A goshuinchō (御朱印帳) — an accordion-folded album sold at shrines and stationers. It turns a pile of loose paper into an object worth keeping, and it is the cheapest souvenir on this list that still means something in ten years.

Etiquette, in one line each

Visit first, stamp after	Pay respects, then go to the office. The stamp is a record of the visit, not a ticket.
Have the book open	Hand it over open at the page you want, with the money ready. Small coins.
Do not haggle or rush	Someone is writing calligraphy for you. Wait quietly.
One book, one purpose	Many people keep shrines and temples in separate books. Ask if you are unsure — the answer is polite either way.

Shop Japanese

Eighteen words that do real work in a craft shop. Point at this page if you need to — the kanji is there so a shop assistant can read it.

Japanese	Reading	What it does
免税	menzei	Tax-free. The sign in the window and the counter you need.
発送	hassō	Shipping. Ask this when your hands are full.
割れ物	waremono	Fragile. Say it and the wrapping improves immediately.
包装	hōsō	Gift wrapping. Usually free, and very good.
限定	gentei	Limited — by region, season or store.
お土産	omiyage	A souvenir, specifically one brought back for other people.
片刃	kataba	Single-bevel — the professional Japanese blade.
両刃	ryōba	Double-bevel — the santoku and gyuto most people want.
左利き	hidarikiki	Left-handed. Ask before you buy a single-bevel knife.
砥石	toishi	Whetstone.
番手	bante	Grit number.
面直し	mennaoshi	Flattening a dished stone.
御朱印	goshuin	The hand-written shrine or temple seal.
御朱印帳	goshuinchō	The book you collect them in.
窯元	kamamoto	The kiln itself — where the potter works.
一番茶	ichibancha	First flush. The tea worth asking about.
試飲	shiin	A tasting. Distilleries and tea shops both use it.
予約	yoyaku	A booking. Two of the whisky distilleries run a lottery months ahead.

One sentence worth memorising: **これを発送できますか** (kore o hassō dekimasu ka) — "can you ship this?" It is the difference between carrying a box for nine days and not.

Collection log

Print as many copies as you need. One line per stamp, card or piece — the date and the place are what you will want later, not the photograph.

Date	Place	What I got	Notes

Before you fly

- ☐ Knives in checked baggage — never in hand luggage
- ☐ Ceramics in hand luggage, or shipped from the shop
- ☐ Receipts and passport together
- ☐ Tax refund claimed before check-in (from 1 Nov 2026)
- ☐ Consumables still sealed and unopened
- ☐ Bag weighed — pottery, tools and stones are dense

Where this comes from

Every fact in this kit is from a sourced guide on www.nihongo-hub.com: knife towns, pottery towns, tea regions, whisky towns, whetstones, the souvenir hub, and the goshuin, station stamp, manhole card, castle and roadside-station guides. Nothing here is sponsored. Rail times are curated approximations ($\pm 20\%$) for the fastest services. Dates and rules were correct in August 2026 — the tax-free change takes effect on 1 November 2026, so check the current rule if you travel after that date.